

"Thomas Bangalter, former Daft Punk: "I like the idea of being a beginner"

Two years after the separation of the mythical electronic music duo, the musician publishes the album *Mythologies*. Daft Punk fans will discover a symphonic score summoning Bach, Vivaldi, Stravinsky, Prokofiev or the American minimalism.

Interview by Bruno Lesprit

This is the advantage of having spent most of his public life with his head hidden in a robot helmet: we do not recognize the musician Thomas Bangalter, ex-Daft Punk, in a tea room in the heart of the Marais Parisian, and no longer in the street after the interview. By an ironic coincidence, a poster presents the new film in which plays his wife, actress Elodie Bouchez: I will always see your faces. That of Bangalter is now uncovered.

Two years after the announcement of the separation of the most famous electro duo, he signed the album *Mythologies* under his name, music he composed for a ballet by Angelin Preljocaj premiered on July 1, 2022 at the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux, and interpreted by the Orchestre national Bordeaux Aquitaine, under the direction of Romain Dumas. The cover shows a fresco from the imperial villa of Boscotrecase, near Naples: Andromeda delivered on a rock to the appetite of the sea monster Keto, before the salutary intervention of Perseus. This is a bit of what the maverick Bangalter exposes himself to music lovers with this album under the brand of the classic label Erato. Daft Punk fans will discover a symphonic score featuring Bach, Vivaldi, Stravinsky, Prokofiev or American minimalism. While waiting for the reissue, on May 12, of the duo's final album, *Random Access Memories*, for its tenth anniversary."

How did this collaboration with Angelin Preljocaj come about?

The request comes from Angelin, to whom the conductor Marc Minkowski had himself asked for an original work to close their three-year collaboration at the Opéra de Bordeaux. Rather than committing myself right away, I told them that I was going to do a few tests, like a director can do with an actor. I discovered the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux, built a hundred years before the Opéra Garnier, with *Roméo et Juliette*, version by Gounod [in March 2020], and that inspired me on the music I wanted to compose.

From the twenty or so sketches that I presented, Angelin had the idea of these *Mythologies*, which gave meaning to this aesthetic of frescoes, bas-reliefs, decorations like those painted on amphorae, to this fragmented aspect. Initially, he wanted more electronic, more hybrid textures, but that didn't interest me. It wouldn't be contemporary music, but something electronic, more

hybrid, but that didn't interest me. It wouldn't be contemporary music, but something lyrical. Like music on pointe that you have to dance barefoot. It was still a form of retrofuturism, but in a different place than the one we had explored with Daft Punk.

Retrofuturism? You have however rejected this concept systematically associated with Daft Punk...

Ah good ? I accept it when it is not a question of going back to the past, but of taking elements from it and bringing them into the present. I didn't want there to be any amplification, so it was going back historically before electroacoustics. With ancient instruments, humans and especially not machines. For music that can be performed without electricity, therefore both retrofuturistic and post-apocalyptic. This timelessness interested me philosophically, but also technically, because I was apprehensive about confronting a symphony orchestra.

How do you go about composing and above all orchestrating symphonic music when you are not from the conservatory?

This is what motivated me and carried me. While also scaring me quite a bit and slowing me down. I've been making music for about thirty years, a bit of rock at the beginning, techno, disco, orchestral film music, but the big difference between this project and those before is the orchestration. We had an orchestrator for the music of *Tron: Legacy* [2010] and for the string parts of "Giorgio by Moroder" [2013] in the album. *Random Access Memories* [Americans Joseph Trapanese and Chris Caswell respectively]. There, I wrote 650 pages of music. On this disc, I am only the composer.

For nine months, even before writing a note, I listened to music again and read all the treatises on orchestration, by Rimsky-Korsakov, by Berlioz. It was a fast-paced crash course, after which I continued to learn, with the impression of having progressed between the first pages I wrote and the last. I always approached the various projects that I was able to do with Daft Punk as immersion courses, and this was a new one. When we made this cartoon with Leiji Matsumoto [*Interstella 5555: The Story of the Secret Star System*, 2003], I must have made seventeen trips to Japan over a period of a year and a half.

For any record in which I was able to participate, I had the feeling of being an amateur and not relying on an experience. I like the idea of being a beginner, with accidents, unhappy and happy. I knew that I would inevitably make mistakes, but I was ready to accept the bad surprises in order to have the good ones. The conductor Romain Dumas helped me with things that you only learn through experience, the relationship to the effort for the musicians for ninety minutes, the management of the breath for the voices, the difficulty of playing such eight measures...

Writing ballet music inevitably evoked the memory of your mother, dancer, Thérèse Thoreux Bangalter...

I started learning the piano at the age of 6 with a teacher, Pietro Galli, who was the coach of the Paris Opera Ballet. He also accompanied dance lessons and my mother knew him. He was a character who looked a bit like Buster Keaton, that of the Limelights, with half-closed eyes, from another time. It was a bit boring and I wasn't very good at it. I stopped around 12 years old, but I realize today that it is the person who opened me to music. I continued to spend hours at the piano, but it was no longer with scores: in improvisation and harmonies.

My mother, born in Morocco, arrived in 1958 in Paris. She was with Roland Petit and Zizi Jeanmaire for ten years and then joined, in Amiens then in Nancy, the Contemporary Ballet-Théâtre created by the Ministry of Culture at the time of decentralization, of which she was a dancer. main. I remember that she took me as a child to see shows by Pina Bausch at the Théâtre de la Ville, Stravinsky and Le Sacre du Printemps. I also adore Prokofiev, with his ruptures, his disintegrations, his surprises... But my relationship with classical music first passed through cinema, its use in films, Kubrick, Hollywood composers who take up colors from Ravel and Debussy, Morricone too... I have a visual relationship to music, I have always felt like it's the soundtrack to its own movie.

This album therefore appeals, ultimately, to your musical memory, as was the case with Daft Punk for Discovery (2001) and Random Access Memories...

My relationship to symphonic music is less precise. In Discovery, there are direct homages to a particular artist or sound, the Buggles, Supertramp or AC/DC. We don't come across Supertramp's Wurlitzer keyboard sound by chance: we want to put it on, it's a manifesto. There, it's almost like automatic writing, more spontaneous and less thoughtful.

Mythologies, by Thomas Bangalter, 2 Erato/Warner Classics CDs, release April 7. Mythologies, by Angelin Preljocaj, La Criée-Théâtre national de Marseille, from June 8 to 11.

Random Access Memories (10th Anniversary Edition), Daft Punk, 2 Columbia/Sony CDs, released May 12.